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ABSTRACT

The study summarized in this report explored the attitudes of 320 teachers employed at three ethnically diverse high schools selected to pilot the Model Schools Project during the 1988-89 school year. The survey was returned by 164 teachers. The researcher-developed study questionnaire elicited attitudes toward school reform, perceptions of the Illinois School Reform Act in general, and policy changes directly affecting classroom teachers. The attitude scale generated measures on two constructs: endorsement of school reform and anxiety about the specific policy changes. Several analyses (the independent T-test, pairwise comparisons, and polarized categorizations) were employed to evaluate the effects of teacher characteristics on the endorsement and anxiety scales. Teachers generally appear to have low endorsement of the School Reform Act and some anxiety about the proposed policy changes. The most experienced teachers were the most anxious and had the lowest endorsement for the reform bill. Teachers directly involved in the school's pilot of a school-based management model had significantly greater endorsement and expressed lower anxiety than nonparticipants. Conclusions and implications of teachers' low endorsement/low anxiety attitude profiles are discussed. (11 references.) (MLH)

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A Study of Teachers' Attitudes Toward School Reform

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
American Educational Research Association
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A Study of Teachers' Attitudes Toward School Reform

Introduction

Throughout this country, many school districts are in the process of change. For most, this change which has the potential for substantial impact, is referred to as educational reform. Reform in our schools was viewed as necessary, resulting from the soaring dropout rates, decreases in student achievement, increases in teen pregnancy, and other crucial circumstances that schools encounter today. A public outcry coupled with political pressure for greater accountability, stirred educators to join forces in saying "something must be done."

One of the major problems that must be confronted if reform efforts are to be successful is the support and the involvement of those who will be affected, i.e., school administrators, teachers, parents and students. However, excluding administrators, few of these persons have been involved during the pre-implementation stages nor have they received information on decisions as they were made.

Typically, the more people know about an issue, the better prepared they are to determine how it will affect them and whether or not they will support it. Teachers, for the most part, appear to have been left out of the initial development, and communication chain of the reform movement. Most teachers probably have not read the complete reform bill for themselves, it is likely that what they have read has been excerpts, summaries and commentaries. If this is true, teachers may feel uniformed, unfamiliar as well as excluded, and perhaps even, indifferent. Under these circumstances, social issues that are as consequential as school reform, and are believed to act more or less favorable for one group than another often tend to polarize people in their support.

The interest and focus of this study was on teachers' attitudes regarding school reform. It delved into the attitudes of teachers at schools that were selected to pilot a reform model. The study's purpose was to examine the relationship between teacher characteristics and their attitudes toward school reform. Teacher characteristics of gender, ethnicity, and tenure were used as criteria for determining differences as well as direct involvement in the model schools project, knowledge of the proposed policies, and location of the school which would dictate the local governance for each school.

If teachers appear anxious about the new policies, their unfamiliarity with or lack of understanding could be the cause. These findings would have implication to administrators and can serve as a needs assessment index for staff development, and may identify specific areas of concern. Further, an attitude

survey given prior to full implementation of the proposed policies could serve as a valuable resource tool. The results from this study can be used to determine whether attitudes of the teachers in this large urban school district were consistent with those found in other studies on the issue of educational reform (Boyer, 1988; Carnegie Foundation, 1988; Henley, 1988; Rodman, 1985; Wangberg, 1987).

One idea that spearheads most reform implementation is that of shared decision-making by those who will be affected. There are many models for increasing this locally controlled decision-making, both theoretical and actual. In fact, there are as many concepts than can be piloted as there are creative and imaginative people to develop them. The Model Schools Project which is the common denominator for the schools in this study, rests on the belief that school staff, parents, community members, and others interested in the education of children share in the making of decisions for that school.

Model Schools Overview

The Model Schools Project in this urban school district was designed to pilot locally created models of school-based management in a select number of schools. The participating schools developed individual plans in the areas of curriculum, budget/fiscal management, personnel, etc. based on local needs. Significant flexibility was permitted in reconfiguring curriculum and staffing as well as exercising maximum control over budget decisions in order to effectively restructure the teaching and learning environment of the school. Teacher representatives participated at various levels and served on subcommittees. In this case, some teachers had more involvement that others within each building. The implementation process of this pilot program and the impact on student outcomes was to guide future policy decisions and to provide context based descriptions for other schools implementing school-based management practices.

Research Perspective

A review of the literature suggests that while the success of school reform ultimately lies with the classroom teachers, they may be the one group least represented in the decision making process. If this is true, such a movement could generate mixed emotions ranging from enthusiasm to resentment and even rebellion. As one author stated, "any attempt to reform any one problem without giving attention to the underlying structural flaws may, inadvertently make matters worse" (McNeil, 1988). In Landsmann (1987), Ernest Boyer stated that teachers are the real powers behind school reform; that reform is based on how teachers view themselves as professionals; and that their co-workers either reinforce their confidence or diminish it. If they

receive signals that what they do will not be recognized or appreciated, it either gives them a sense of authority and excitement, or one of powerlessness. Thus, "...the leverage point is the classroom." Yet, the literature suggests that teachers may be the "missing link in the reform movement". These claims acknowledge that teachers have not been sufficiently involved, that teachers are supposedly represented, but they are not participants (Wangberg, 1988; Boyer, 1988; Johnson, 1988; Henley, 1987).

One study (Rodman, 1985) that polled teachers on school reform found that 63 percent reported that reform policies had been implemented without their input, and 61 percent felt that reform decisions were not based on the perceptions of teachers, but were viewed instead as another "top-down" decision. When decisions are made in this way, job dissatisfaction will likely result. Research has found that when decisions were made in cooperation with those whom they most affected, improved attendance, morale and production resulted (Gordon, Edwards, and Reich, 1982; Levi, 1981). Based on findings from a study conducted by The Carnegie Foundation in which teachers across the nation were surveyed, it was suggested that if the reform movement is to be successful, administrators may need to look beyond policy and regulations and make greater efforts toward teacher recognition (Boyer, 1988; Odden, 1988; Johnson, 1988). Many involved in reform would agree that one factor that will determine successful implementation is teacher acceptance, which will be greatly affected by their attitudes.

Research Questions

Specifically, this study was designed to address the following questions:

1. How do teachers feel about school reform?
   a. Do they endorse the proposed reform policy?
   b. Are they anxious about policy changes that affect them?
   c. Does their involvement make a difference?

2. How much knowledge do teachers have about the new reform policy? Where did they get their information?

3. Is there a relationship between teachers' attitudes toward reform and their gender, ethnicity, and tenure?

4. Is there a relationship between teachers' attitudes and the location of the school which they work?

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study were approximately 320 teachers employed at three high schools that were selected to pilot the Model Schools Project during the 1988-89 school year. These three high schools represent the ethnic diversity and cultural divisions of this large school district. The survey was returned by a total of 164 teachers from the three high schools.

General information items on the survey requested teachers to provide their years of experience, gender classification, and their racial/ethnic origin. These data resulted in responses from 15% of teachers with up to 10 years of experience, 33% having 11-20 years, and 51% having more than 20 years of experience. Respondents were 47% males and 52% females. Racial/ethnic classifications were not submitted by 15% of the respondents, many indicated that they did not see the relevance of this item. Of those responding, 52% were White, 37% Black, 9% Hispanic, 2% Other, which included Asian and American Indian.

Instrumentation

A twenty-five item questionnaire was developed by the lead author and used in this study. Nineteen items were descriptive of attitudes toward school reform: twelve items reflected perceptions of the bill in general, seven items focused on policy changes that directly affected classroom teachers. The attitude scale was designed as a five point rating scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The five point scale was reduced to four points after eliminating the "not sure" choice designed to accommodate those who were undecided. The remaining six items on the questionnaire solicited demographic information about the respondents, their knowledge of the proposed reform policy, and their involvement in their school's model project. In addition, the instrument also provided space for any comments the respondents wished to make regarding the mandated policy changes.

The attitude scale generated measures on two constructs. These constructs were 1) "endorsement" of school reform, and 2) "anxiety" about the specific policy changes. The Endorsement scale mirrored the Purdue Master Attitude Scales: Any Social Action. These scales have demonstrated validity in differentiating among attitudes known to differ among various groups. The reliability coefficients for the two forms (A & B) ranged from .71 to .92.

Both scales, Endorsement and Anxiety, were determined by an aggregate of responses to specific items. The Endorsement scale represented the degree to which respondents agreed with

statements typically made about a proposed social action and several that specifically reflects common perceptions of the reform policy. Reliability coefficient indices were computed for the attitude scales. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the Endorsement scale was .92. The Anxiety scale which represented more specific statements extracted from a summary of the new policy provisions as they apply to the classroom teacher, produced a reliability coefficient of .76. These item-scale correlations indicate that both scales yielded fairly reliable measures.

Data Analysis

Several analyses were used to evaluate the effects of teacher characteristics on the Endorsement and Anxiety scales. First, an independent T-test was used to determine whether differences existed among the variables of teachers' gender, ethnicity, and "involvement" in the Model Schools Project. For the purpose of performing the independent T-test, the racial/ethnic classification was collapsed into two groups, White and minority. Second, four one-way analysis of variances were performed to assess the effects of ethnicity, tenure, "knowledge" of the reform policy, and "location" of the school within the city--north, central, south. Post hoc pairwise comparisons were conducted following significant ANOVAS. Finally, in order to determine the degree of endorsement and anxiety, the two sub-scales were polarized into two categories, high and low. The Endorsement scale had a highest possible means score of 40.00. The Anxiety scale had 24.00 as the maximum score. The sub-scale means were compared in terms of their relative position on these continuum.

Results

The attitude statements on the questionnaire were grouped to develop two sub-scales. These two sub-scales were Endorsement and Anxiety. The attitude represented by the Endorsement scale is one of sanction, giving support to, or showing approval of. The Anxiety scale represents an attitude characterized by an apprehensive uneasiness usually over an impending or anticipated action.

The independent T-test results for each of the two scales by teacher characteristics, or factors are presented in Table 1. There were no overall significant differences found for either of the attitudes scales for the factors of gender and ethnicity. However, direct involvement of teachers in the Model Schools Project was believed to be a factor that might influence their attitudes. As expected the group responding "yes" had the highest mean on the Endorsement scale and the lowest mean on the Anxiety scale. While a significant difference was found to exist

on the Endorsement scale, no such difference was found on the Anxiety scale between those teachers who reported they were directly involved in the planning and implementation of the Model Schools Project, and those who indicated they were not involved ($t = 2.01$, $p < .05$).

Table 1

T-test Results by Teacher Characteristics for the Endorsement and Anxiety Scales

ENDORSEMENT SCALE

Teacher Characteristic	N	X	SD	DF	T	P
Gender:						
Male	72	14.2	5.77	150	-1.15	.691
Female	80	13.8	6.30			
Ethnic Origin:						
White	73	13.1	4.89	137	-1.15	.253
Minority	66	14.3	6.85			
Project Involvement:						
Yes	41	15.3	6.30	132	2.01	.046*
No	93	13.1	5.90			

ANXIETY SCALE

Teacher Characteristic	N	X	SD	DF	T	P
Gender:						
Male	72	12.3	4.86	150	-1.09	.276
Female	80	11.5	4.36			
Ethnic Origin:						
White	73	12.5	4.75	137	1.44	.150
Minority	66	11.4	4.52			
Project Involvement:						
Yes	41	11.4	4.17	132	-1.23	.221
No	93	12.4	4.65			

* $p < .05$

ANOVA results for the Endorsement scale are given in Table 2. This procedures for the racial/ethnic factor resulted in no differences between the White teachers and the minority teachers, Black and Hispanic. However, it can be seen that significant differences were found among teachers of varying years of experience ($F= 4.105$, $p < .05$). The table shows that teachers with fewer years of experience have a much higher mean than those having more teaching experience. A significant difference was found among the teachers having ten years or less and those having more than ten years of experience. Tukey's pairwise

Table 2
Endorsement Scale Results for
ANOVA by Teacher Characteristic

Teacher Characteristic	N	X	SD	DF	SS	F	P
Ethnic Origin:							
White	73	13.1	4.89	135	4761.03	1.105	.332
Black	51	14.6	6.96				
Hispanic	12	13.0	6.99				
Tenure:							
1-10 years	6	20.2	4.96	110	3744.40	4.105	.018*
11-20 years	24	14.2	5.39				
> 20 years	81	13.3	5.79				
Knowledge:							
Much	25	17.2	7.20	112	4436.02	5.306	.006*
Some	83	12.9	5.62				
None	5	10.8	7.10				
Location:							
North	56	13.6	5.03	163	5687.19	1.838	.161
Central	56	12.8	5.39				
South	52	14.9	7.10				

* $p < .05$

comparisons also found differences between teachers with 1-10 years of experience and those having more than ten years, but no difference between teachers having 11-20 years and those having more than 20 years of teaching experience was found.

The extent to which teachers felt knowledgeable about the educational reform movement and the proposed policy changes was included as a factor of interest. Significant differences were

found among those teachers who stated that they had varying degrees of knowledge ($F= 5.306$, $p < .05$). Again, using the Tukey procedure clearly shows a difference between teachers who reported having very much knowledge and those reporting they had none, and no difference between the group having much knowledge and some knowledge, or the groups who stated they had some knowledge and no knowledge at all.

ANOVA results for the Anxiety scale are displayed in Table 3. There were no significant differences found for any of the teacher characteristics studied. While there appears to be some degree of anxiety among them, it exist at nearly the same level for White teachers as it does for Black and Hispanic teachers.

Table 3
Anxiety Scale results for
ANOVA by Teacher Characteristic

Teacher Characteristic	N	X	SD	DF	SS	F	P
Ethnic Origin:							
White	73	12.5	4.75	135	2887.97	1.171	.310
Black	51	11.3	4.47				
Hispanic	12	11.4	4.42				
Tenure:							
1-10 years	6	08.3	4.68	110	2291.24	1.660	.194
11-20 years	24	11.5	4.15				
> 20 years	81	11.8	4.63				
Knowledge:							
Much	25	11.8	4.84	112	2230.00	2.248	.109
Some	83	12.2	4.23				
None	5	08.0	5.34				
Location:							
North	56	11.8	4.97	16	3580.02	.457	.637
Central	56	12.3	4.59				
South	52	11.5	4.52				

$p < .05$

Anxiety differences among tenured teachers are also non-existent, although teachers having less than ten years of experience had a lower mean than those having more than ten years of teaching experience. Comparable to the Endorsement scale, the lowest mean in the knowledge group was the one that indicated they had no knowledge at all about the School Reform Act. Location of the

school was later included in the analysis because each of the schools is located in a designated racial/ethnic community and that predominated group could determine the composition of the school's Local School Council,i.e., the parent group empowered by the School Reform Act to govern the school. Paralleling the Endorsement scale, school location proved not to be a factor on the Anxiety scale. Consequently, no significant differences were found among teachers at neither of the high schools for those teachers responding to the survey.

The two sub-scale means were assessed to determine whether endorsement and anxiety was high or low. The Endorsement scale had a mean of 17.63. The Anxiety scale had a mean of 12.63. Based on this evaluation, it can be said that teachers appear generally to have low endorsement of the School Reform Act, and there appears to be some anxiety about the proposed policy changes as they directly affect classroom teachers.

Means and variances for the two sub-scales and means and standard deviations for each of the items used to generate the sub-scale are presented in Table 4. For the Endorsement scale, 70% of the items fall in the disagreement categories. The remaining 30% are just slightly above. The Anxiety scale shows that half of the item means fall in the disagreement range and the other half are meagerly above. While most of the items' percent of responses seem to be evenly split between 40-60% who either agreed or disagreed, a few items received vastly different responses. On the Endorsement scale, nearly 70% disagreed that the School Reform Act shows great possibility of being successful, or that it is sure to be effective in bring about change, or that it will have positive, long term effects. Likewise, 92% disagreed that reform will solve their school's problems. On the Anxiety scale which had fewer items, respondents evenly shared their opinions on only two items. Nearly 80% agreed to being disturbed about parents being able to recommend textbooks. While nearly 70% have some uneasiness about the Local School Council automony, and the new dismissal policy, an astonishing 77% disagreed that they are fearful for their jobs.

Discussion

The study was an initial attempt to examine and analyze teachers' attitudes toward the School Reform Act prior to full implementation. The particular schools of interest were those that participated in a pilot project to implement a school-based management model. The teacher characteristics or factors compared in the study appear to indicate that, although low, all groups of teachers have similar feelings in their endorsement of the new legislation, and that while there is some degree of anxiety among them it should not be cause for alarm. In fact, it could be viewed somewhat as confident, or may even indifferent about the proposed policy changes that most directly affect them.

Table 4
Means and Variances for Attitude scales
with Means and Standard Deviations by item

ENDORSEMENT SCALE: **Mean: 17.625** **Variance: 53.696**

	Item	% agree	% disagree	Mean	SD
The School Reform Act:					
1.	is vitally necessary for welfare of the students	43	57	1.63	1.061
4.	shows great possibility of being successful	31	69	1.63	1.061
6.	will do just as much harm as it will good	42	58	2.38	1.188
7.	is a ridiculous plan	43	57	2.38	1.188
8.	genuinely has the students' interest as the major concern	43	57	1.63	.916
10.	is a policy created by "top" administrators and passed "down" to teachers	42	58	2.25	1.282
11.	will solve my schools' problems	08	92	1.25	.707
13.	is sure to be effective in bringing about change	32	68	1.25	.707
16.	will have positive, long term effects	27	73	1.50	1.035

Table 4 (cont'd)
Means and Variances for Attitude scales
with Means and Standard Deviations by item

	Item	% agree	% disagree	Mean	SD
17.	actively involved teachers in the planning process	47	53	1.75	1.035
ANXIETY SCALE:		**Mean: 12.625**		**Variance: 23.411**	
	Item	% agree	% disagree	Mean	SD
3.	disturbs me that parents will recommend our textbooks	79	21	2.62	1.302
5.	has me anxious about Local School Council automony	68	32	2.38	1.302
12.	has me nervous about principal's responsibility to select teachers	41	59	1.88	1.356
14.	makes me apprehensive about the dismissal policy	71	29	1.75	1.356
15.	makes me fearful for my job	23	77	2.38	1.408
18.	bothers me that assistant principals will be authorized to evaluate teachers	55	45	1.62	.744

It was projected that teachers' attitudes toward the school reform that had been proposed for this large urban school district would be positive. The study's finding does not carry enough evidence to reject this postulate. While teachers endorsement of school reform does not appear to be high, it is not fair to say that endorsement is not positive. On the other hand, a low endorsement could be equated as high disagreement since the response scale requested a degree of agreement. In this sense, disagreement can be viewed as negative endorsement.

It was strongly felt that the more experienced teachers would appear more confident about the proposed policy changes than the lesser experienced teachers. This was not the case, the data shows that the more experienced teachers were the most anxious and had the lowest endorsement of the School Reform Act. Conversely, the less experienced teachers had the highest endorsement for school reform and the lowest anxiety about its implementation. Realistically, this comes as no surprise and can be explained simply because the more experienced teachers feel they have the most to lose by the new policy, particularly since now seniority has no holding power. Experienced teachers are often the least receptive to innovation and some perceive reform as a process to motivate them to early retirement.

The premise that the teachers who were included in the pilot program would feel some ownership because they were more informed than those who were not directly involved was confirmed in this study. Teachers who were directly involved in the school's pilot of a school-based management model had significantly greater endorsement for school reform and expressed lower anxiety than those who had not participated. It was interesting that 74% of the sample reported that were either not involved or were not sure whether they were.

A statement made in the introduction of this paper reads, "Typically, the more people know about an issue, the better prepared they are to determine ...whether or not they will support it". The results of this study tend to support this statement. Those respondents who indicated that they have "much" knowledge about school reform also had the greatest endorsement. Another statement related to this proclaims, "if teachers appear anxious about the new policies, their unfamiliarity with...could be a probable cause". This study's findings totally rejects that theory. Surprisingly, those teachers who reported that they know nothing about the educational reform movement or the senate bill, had the lowest anxiety relative to the others in the group. The low anxiety of this group can be interpreted as over confident, but perhaps indifferent. If teachers appear anxious, their lack of knowledge seems not to be an important factor.

One of the items on the questionnaire requested that respondents identify the source from which they received most of their

information. Since this item received multiple responses, it was not useful in determining from where the groups having knowledge of the senate bills got it. It is interesting that 24% of the respondents indicated that they have read the bill itself. Fifty-nine percent (59%) reported that they had attended meeting where the senate bill was a topic for discussion. Sixty-five percent (65%) indicated the newspaper, thirty-seven percent (37 %) marked the television, and forty percent (40%) checked informal conversation as being their source of information.

As expected, the factors of gender and ethnicity seem to disappear and had no bearing on the study's results. In addition, the location of the high school in essence, was a racial/ethnic issue, was a not a factor.

Conclusion

Low endorsement, yet low anxiety goes unexplained. The few significant differences found on the Endorsement scale, while none were found on the Anxiety scale does have implications. One could be linked to a general perception that school reform in this large urban school district is politically motivated, and like most political issues, "this too will pass". Another could be that which results from an older teaching force of teachers who may be indifferent to prospects for change. It seems obvious that teachers intuitively know something about reform that those of us who are looking objectively cannot see and perhaps, something that will never be revealed on surveys of this nature.

These findings have implication for staff development efforts. Low endorsement tends to signal a resistance to change. Teachers who are nearing the end of their careers are likely to view prospects of change or improvement rather pessimistically. Their lack of involvement in the planning would also tend to make them cynical. Such teachers would be reluctant to try new approaches and would need extensive help to enhance motivation and raise enthusiasm.

It is recognized that the external validity of these results are limited to some degree/due to the design of the study. Specifically, the small sample cannot be generalized to the population of high school teachers. Since only a few high schools participated in the pilot of the Model Schools Project, the three schools selected were believed to representative of the city's student microcosm.

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APPENDIX

EDUCATIONAL REFORM
Teacher Survey

Directions: This survey is **anonymous**, please do not put your name on this form. Using the scale below, circle the letter that best describes your agreement with the statements about School Reform Act of 1988. Answer all remaining items appropriately. Your comments would be appreciated.

5 = Strongly Agree
4 = Agree
3 = Not Sure
2 = Disagree
1 = Strongly Disagree

THE SCHOOL REFORM ACT OF 1988:	SD	D	NS	A	SA
1. is vitally necessary for the welfare of the students.....	1	2	3	4	5
2. is not needed because the present system is an effective one.....	1	2	3	4	5
3. disturbs me that parents will recommend our textbooks.....	1	2	3	4	5
4. shows great possibility of being successful.....	1	2	3	4	5
5. has me anxious about Local School Council autonomy.....	1	2	3	4	5
6. will do just as much harm as it will good.....	1	2	3	4	5
7. is a ridiculous plan.....	1	2	3	4	5
8. genuinely has the students' interest as the major concern.....	1	2	3	4	5
9. is accepted by me with reservation.....	1	2	3	4	5
10. is a policy created by "top" administrators and passed "down" to teachers	1	2	3	4	5
11. will solve my schools' problems.....	1	2	3	4	5
12. has me nervous about principal's responsibility to select teachers.....	1	2	3	4	5
13. is sure to be effective in bringing about change.....	1	2	3	4	5
14. makes me apprehensive about the new dismissal policy.....	1	2	3	4	5

(over)

		SD	D	NS	A	SA
15.	makes me fearful for my job.....	1	2	3	4	5
16.	will have positive, long term effects.....	1	2	3	4	5
17.	actively involved teachers in the planning process.....	1	2	3	4	5
18.	bothers me that assistant principals will be authorized to evaluate teachers.....	1	2	3	4	5
19.	makes me uneasy that my classroom will be observed twice each year.....	1	2	3	4	5

GENERAL INFORMATION

20. How much do you know about the educational reform movement and Illinois Senate Bill #1840.

    1 very much knowledge
    2 some knowledge
    3 a little knowledge
    4 very little knowledge
    5 no knowledge at all

21. From what source did you get most of your information on The School Reform Act.

    1 the bill itself
    2 attendance at meetings
    3 newspapers
    4 television
    5 informal conversations

22. Are you directly involved with your school's reform implementation project? 1 yes 2 no 3 not sure

23. How many total years of teaching experience do you have?

    1 1-3 year(s)
    2 4-10 years
    3 11-15 years
    4 16-20 years
    5 20 years or greater

24. What is your gender classification? 1 male 2 female

25. What is your racial/ethnic classification?

    1 White
    2 Black
    3 Hispanic
    4 Asian
    5 American Indian

COMMENTS: _____

_____

_____

THANK YOU FOR TAKING TIME TO COMPLETE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.